Donated Tapes Collection
Oakland Neighborhood History Project

Oakland Public Library
Oakland History Room

We, Paul Christie (narrator) and Elaine Hammill, (interviewer)

do hereby give to the Oakland Neighborhood History Project for such scholarly and educational uses as the Project Director shall determine the following tape-recorded interview(s) recorded on (date) _____ as an unrestricted gift and transfer to the Camron-Stanford House Preservation Association legal title and all literary property rights including copyright. This gift does not preclude any use which we may want to make of the information in the recordings ourselves.

NARRATOR

Paul Christie
Signature of narrator

PAUL CHRISTIE
Name of narrator

2556 GROVE ST, OAKLAND
Address Sept 4, 1981

2556 GROVE ST OAK CAL

(dated) 45/4697

INTERVIEWER

Elaine K. Hammill
Signature of interviewer

ELAINE HAMMILL
Name of interviewer

396 LA CASA VIA, WALNUT CREEK
Address of interviewer

Sept 4, 1981
(dated)

Accepted for the Oakland Neighborhood History Project

by _____ _____
(Project Director) (Dated)

Donated Tapes Collection

Oakland Neighborhood
History Project

General Topic of Interview Generic Reminisces of West Oakland

Date 9/4/81 Place Calif. Wholesale Grocery Co. Length 1 Hr 30 Mins

Narrator	Interviewer
Name Paul Christie	Name Elaine Hamill
Address 2556 Grove St	Address 396 La Casa Via
Oakland, CA.	Walnut Creek, Ca 94598
Name & address of relative, friend	Relationship to narrator [friend, neighbor, etc.]
	name originally given by
	Fr. Paris
Birthplace Skopi (Tripolis) Greece	Length of acquaintance
Birthdate 1907	Occasion of interview Oakland
Occupation(s) Wholesale Grocer	Neighborhood History Project

Interview Data

Subjects covered, in approximate order, spelling out names of persons and places mentioned

Estimated Time on Tape	Contents
0-16	To Oakland via Burbank 1918-11 yrs. old-fr. Tripolis
16-27	Greece to West Oakland -403 Pine St.
28-33	2nd house in 1930's = Ruby Street
33-42	names of neighbors
42-47	p arties, picnics, schools
48-68	railroad jobs-Greeks in West Oakland
68-72	Church at 12th & Brush
72	kinds of jobs (railraod, ships, WWI, ferry)
84	[illegible]
91	[illegible]
104	neighborhood feeling
106	Why move from West Oakland-living together at 1st

Use back of sheet if necessary

121 Wives - Greek girls
125 Church - teaching religion only then - Brush St.
Church built 1921 for $30,000
146 Greek peddling wagons - Lake Merritt
162 Americanization of Gteeks - barrier 1st = language
[illegible] Discrimination: "Get off the sidewalks, Greeks"
184 1st Greek priest; church = backbone
201 "Every foreigner had a chance to come up"
213 return to Greece, a mistake
221 Boy's job filling r/r car lamps at nite
240 Father's job = $175 per month
245 Selling papers
252 Armistice Day WWI Story
266 1st teacher, Burbank - 11 yr. old in kindergarten
274 no playtime for him
281 paying off mortgage in Gteece
290 $150 per month to live on, shopping on 7th St
314 "not like it used to be"
321 What did for fun: name days, picnics, Eastshore Park
369 1921 Independence Day Parade, Mason's Parade

SIDE B

1-6 no neighborhood crime -police walk beat
16 shopping; cost of food, clothes
38 ferry
42 Opening of Bay Bridge ceremony-Olivia DeHaviland-1933
impact of Bay Bridge
[illegible] WWI boys coming home, singing
78 Posey Tube, Idora Park, Ruby St.neighborhood-Temescal
88 → Early stories of Greek r/r workers, sleep in boxcars
103 Mr. Christie's father originally came 1898 to Chicago
[illegible] r/r wages; where met wife
[illegible] impact WWII=little
132 Calif. Wholesale Grocery beginnings 1931
151 re. Mr. C's birthplace, Skopi
162-174 blank
177 Black impact
195 other neighborhoods
210 beginning in Oakland
215 local clubs: Benevolent Society of Oakland, Aheppa, "Panacardia Federation of America"-125 chapters-Skopi chapter-still active; Gapa
265 Worth of clubs
269 beautiful job of church in America
287 Brush Street Church; Mr. C President
308 boundaries of West Oakland=Henry StxMarketx18th=12 blocks
320 Standard of living in West Oakland; all poor; 50¢ dues to church
341 Eastshore Park; picnics; dances
382 1906 earthquake, general reminisces
[illegible] Rail fare reminisces again; $80 for boat ticket back to Greece from N.Y.; $125 to Greece from Oakland

Tape 11-Side A

1-5 Fare to Greece cont.
[illegible] Feeling of Greek village when "American Greek" returns; "I wanted to come to America"
13 rough American boys
[illegible] Mr. C Sr. also went to Mexico (before coming to Burbank)
26 uncle-why come to USA? proverty
34 still find gold on streets
36 Indians on streets
42 walking down 7th street; coffee houses

[redacted]

62 "Can't beat American spirit"; what made good kids"
63 60 years later, Greek villages still poor
76-78 fortunate to live in America
80 "I did not like L.A.-not concentrated-Greek people spread all over
[redacted]
95 Lekas cafe
100 Greek restaurant treat Greeks, not take money
[redacted]
111 Depression; 8¢ gasoline; $100 Buick; $1.00 day meals; house now $60,000 -same house then $1500; jobs during depression=$2.00 per day to feed family (uncle)
[redacted]
174 brother in movie industry; with Reagan in Guild
185 Mother missed Greece-courage to leave home
[redacted]
216 Giving away Greek home lands
224 mother "crying for Greece all her life"' lived til 94 yrs. old.
230 senior citizens home for Greeks
235 Mr. Christie's wife; Manteca farm foreclosed; best man at Fred's Stavropolous' wedding (he killed by black)
276 Greek kids get out of family businesses
288 Schools did good job; repairing cars in back
300 discipline in schools then; parents' guidance
310 cafeteria in school
320 Mr. C's first attempt at English: "Calm cow drink Water"

CHRISTIE, PAUL

ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES CENTER
Sonoma State University
Building 29
1801 East Cotati Avenue
Rohnert Park, CA 94928-3609

#[redacted]
4



OAKLAND NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Paul Christie

Paul Christie (nee Christopoulos) came to West Oakland in 1918 as an eleven-year-old. He was born in an impoverished village in southern Greece near the city of Tripolis and first immigrated to America in 1917 where his parents worked on a small farm in Burbank, California. Christie's uncle worked for the Southern Pacific in West Oakland and he secured a job on the railroad for Christie's father.

From 1918-1922 the Christie family lived at 403 Pine Street, next door to the boyhood home of Jack London [Project Block 20]. They paid $12.50 a month in rent for their five-room home which included two bedrooms, a kitchen, living room and dining room over a raised basement. Mr. Christie recalls sitting on the spacious front porch watching the men return via railroad at the close of World War I. The Pine Street neighborhood was definitely ethnically mixed although several Greek families, including Christie's uncle, lived nearby. Many neighbors, women as well as men, worked for the Southern Pacific. Christie himself worked the graveyard shift when he was 15-16, cleaning and refilling the kerosene lamps in the roundhouse.

In 1931 Paul Christie started the California Wholesale Grocery Company in Oakland which was still in business at the time of this interview.

Interview conducted September 4, 1981 by Elaine Hammill for the Oakland Neighborhood History Project. Transcription prepared December 1996 by Karana Hattersley-Drayton for Sonoma State University Anthropological Studies Center.

OAKLAND NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Paul Christie

[Interview conducted 4 September 1981 by Elaine Hammill for the Oakland Neighborhood History Project. Partial transcription December 1996 by Karana Hattersley-Drayton for the Cypress Freeway Replacement Project, Sonoma State University Anthropological Studies Center.]

[Only those parts which are pertinent to the Cypress Project have been transcribed. Other material is summarized only.]

[Tape is cued up. Mr. Christie was interviewed at his place of work, the California Wholesale Grocery Company in Oakland, California. Christie came to Oakland in May of 1918. He was 11 at the time. His family had emigrated the year before and lived for a year in Burbank, California. His parents were from Greece, his father was from Tripoli and from a small impoverished village. What was the draw to come to Oakland? Did they hear about Oakland in particular before they left? No, they worked on a farm for a while in Burbank. Then his uncle advised them that Oakland would be a good place to find a job and so they came north.]

Paul Christie: "And from there [Burbank] we came to Oakland. I lived in West Oakland... at 403 Pine Street. My father got a job immediately at the Southern Pacific in the roundhouse. Used to hire a lot people in those days, a lot of Greeks worked there. So, he got a job and worked there and we lived there for 4 1/2 years, the same address...."

Elaine Hammill: "Now how many were in your family?"

Christie: "Uh, just a brother and my parents and myself. So after that we moved to Los Angeles for a few years and we found out we didn't like it, we came back again, 1931. And we live here ever since."

Hammill: "Uh-huh. So you didn't go back to the same house?"

Christie: "No."

Hammill: "Did you come back to West Oakland?"

Christie: "No, we didn't. We lived down here on Ruby Street, yeah, 49th and Ruby...."

Hammill: "So you were in West Oakland from when to when?"

Christie: "1918 to 1922, 4 1/2 years."

Hammill: "So how old were you through that period?"

Christie: "Then I was 11, about 16 when we left here...."

Hammill: "Ok, I would particularly like to hear about your neighborhood then in West Oakland. Tell me about the neighbors."

Christie: "It was a nice place to live. A lot of nice people, we met a lot of nice Greek people. Wonderful people."

Hammill: "Were there Greek people on either side of you...?"

Christie: "No there were several Greek families, some American families."

Hammill: "Do you remember the names?"

Christie: "Mr. and Mrs. Miller used to live right next door to us, American people, American people, very lovely people. Mr. Stephapopoulos, another Greek family, right across the street. I had an uncle, Mr. Christopoulos who lived across the street there. There were several Greek families that lived around the area. We became good friends with them, they were very nice, very hospitable. And we met a lot of American people. But the people were nice in those days, they were different, they were nice and generous and kind."

Hammill: "Did you get together for parties?"

Christie: "Oh, the most beautiful parties in the world. Name days... New Year's, Easter Sundays, a lot of parties. And picnics, the church used to give affairs."

Hammill: "Now are you talking about like Greek affairs?"

Christie: "Yeah. Greek affairs-"

Hammill: "All Greek people or-"

Christie: "No, American people used to come. Beautiful dances, beautiful times in those days."

Hammill: "Tell me more about your immediate neighbors. Did you all, did you play with the children, for example?"

Christie: "Yes. I went to school, I went to Prescott School on 12th and Campbell, in West Oakland. I went there for several years. And after that there was another school

on 12th and Market, I went to that school there for a while. Yeah, we mixed up with the American kids. And that's how I got started...."

Hammill: [The two try to remember the name of the school at 12th and Market.] "Back to your neighborhood a little bit: did the other men in the neighborhood work for the railroad?"

Christie: "Quite a few of them, yes."

Hammill: "Uh-huh. Do you remember if the Millers and the-"

Christie: "The Millers did not work in the railroad. A lot of the Greek people worked there and a lot of American people. Some neighbors, there was quite a few neighbors, Greek neighbors, but a lot of American people worked there too. You could see men of my country, walk through the streets. When the whistle blew, you know, it was fantastic. I watched them go home. You sit on the porch and watch them, see?"

Hammill: "Did you feel like your neighborhood was---you didn't call it particularly a Greek neighborhood then?"

Christie: "No. No, it was a mixed neighborhood. Quite a few Greek people there. You could say that the Greeks loved to live there, on account of so many Greeks in West Oakland. They loved it there. And a little later that's why they built a church down on 12th and Brush. 'Cause there were a lot of Greeks down in that area, they used to live down there. It was quite a nice place to live."

Hammill: "Do you think that maybe just the first Greek person came and settled there and then others followed...?"

Christie: "Quite a few, quite a few settled there, yes. There were a lot of jobs in Oakland in those days. You could get jobs down in the shipyard, on the Red Line (they put a Red Line) and railroad shops. They used to build ships in those days. There was a big shipyard there."

Hammill: "This is World War I? This is before World War I or right after?"

Christie: "Well, right at the conclusion of the first World War, the ship yard was at its peak. A lot of people worked there. So and the Greeks used to work, some of them down at the Oakland Pier. Some of them used to work in the ferry boats, making [?] to San Francisco...."

Hammill: "The men walked to work?"

Christie: "Yes. Yes. ...there was streetcars in Oakland you could take ... [but] they weren't fast like they are today. Travelling was kind of slow. So to get to work they had to get up a little early and so forth. And most of them used to walk down to the Southern Pacific or the shipyards."

Hammill: "Did the women in the neighborhood work?"

Christie: "Some of them did. Yes, some had jobs."

Hammill: "Do you remember what kind of jobs?"

Christie: "There was a car shop also at the foot of Pine Street, Southern Pacific had a car shop. And they used to go and like cleaning cars, you know, when the ... passenger car, they used to go and clean them."

Hammill: "Hmm. The women?"

Christie: "Yes. So there's a few women that used to work there, American women, Greek women. So, that's how the Greeks got started, you know, by working originally. They had a hard time to get established."

Hammill: "Was language a problem?"

Christie: "Yes. The language was a problem. They had a Day School there on Peralta and some of the other schools around. The Greeks used to go, work at nights and go a few hours during the day to learn English which helped them a whole lot."

Hammill: "Was that sponsored by the church or-"

Christie: "No, the city."

Hammill: "The City."

Christie: "I remember one particular school, it was down at Seventh and Peralta. And that was a, the school district had sponsored that. A lot of the boys used to go there, and used to learn quite a bit. So little by little the Greeks, they got Americanized and they got started down there."

Hammill: "Was that true of the other groups too, Mr. Christie...?"

Christie: "Yes, all of the foreigners used to be there too. So the Greeks were scattered all over, not as much as they were in West Oakland. Downtown there was a few of them, down Berkeley there was a few of them. West Oakland I would say was the best place to live for Greeks in those days."

Hammill: "Was there a feeling about the neighborhood, for example. Do you recall, how did you feel about the neighborhood at Temescal or Berkeley, compared to West Oakland? Was West Oakland the best?"

Christie: "Well for the Greeks it was because they got settled there. They liked it there originally. After a while they spread around and they found a better place to live. And they moved out to East Oakland, other districts too."

Hammill: "What would make them move?"

Christie: "Oh, some of them went into business. In those days they used to go into candy shop business; had some beautiful candy stores. And when they moved out of there they found other places to live. They found room and board, you know, in some American homes. And they got away from cooking at home. There used to be a group of Greeks, like six, seven, eight, used to rent a house. And they used to cook together and live together to get started, see? But after that they found a better way, an American way of life, which suited them better."

Hammill: "They would rent a house ... or buy?"

Christie: "Or, little later they did that when they made money. They bought homes. Some of them wanted to marry, get married and have families. There was no Greek girls in those days. And they used to bring them from Greece, you know. Bring the brides here and marry here, and I remember some of those weddings. They were just beautiful."

Hammill: "Would they save money and send it back to, or how would they finance that? The men would come first?"

Christie: "Oh no, the men would come and establish and then they brought the brides from Greece. Some nice girls they marry them over here."

Hammill: "They would help pay their way?"

Christie: "Yeah, oh yeah. They paid everything, the whole ticket. They go to New York. And then some of the married American girls and they had beautiful lives and beautiful families."

Hammill: "How prominent a role did the church play in teaching the language and-"

Christie: "Oh, the church she did a beautiful job as far as religion. But, they had no facilities in those days to give ...anything else. Like the church is so well organized today: that they have everything going. So those days the

church brought, they established churches here, brought priests from Greece and it was just beautiful. The Greeks used to love their religion. They still do, even today, it's the same way. Even better, you know? And the church played a big role to hold them together and to get them started."

Hammill: "...do you remember... when this church on Brush Street was built?"

Christie: "It was built, exactly, I remember, 1921 at the cost of $30,000. Just amazing. Today, it's still standing there. They moved it a couple of blocks [due to freeway construction]."

Hammill: "Do you remember Sundays going to church as a family?"

Christie: "Yes, I used to go. I used to love religion... I used to go all the time."

Hammill: "Did you walk from your home?"

Christie: "We used to walk and sometime we used to get, there was a 5 cent jitney from West Oakland to come to 10th and Brush, or downtown. And we take the jitney down and go back again. And Easter Sundays, we used to take the jitney, or even walk, just beautiful, walk down."

Hammill: "The streets were paved at that time? Were there horses and carriages?"

Christie: "Yes-"

Hammill: "And were there horses and carriages?"

Christie: "Yes there were. There were some Greeks even had peddling wagons. That was interesting. They used to go and peddle fruits and vegetables around [the] neighborhoods and they made a living. And some of them had these popcorn cars, they used to go with a wagon, you know, horse and buggy. And they used to go down Lake Merritt every Sunday, it was fantastic, every Sunday! You could see them down there. People used to gather by the hundreds down at Lake Merritt. Beautiful music-"

Hammill: "Oh, for picknicking or walking?"

Christie: "Yes. And they used to do a big business down there. Some of them made a lot of money."

Hammill: "Would that be a Sunday outing after church?"

Christie: "Sunday outing, yes. American people used to go, everybody used to go. Fantastic."

Hammill: "Was there any feeling about, like you hear that the Chinese peddled vegetables and so forth. Was there any feeling like-"

Christie: "There was a few, I think, around there. Not too many. It was a few Chinese."

Hammill: "...was there any feeling between the Greeks who were in the candy business and the restaurant business and any other ethnic group in West Oakland? Or was it just sort of room for all?"

Christie: "In the same kind of business?"

Hammill: "Yes."

Christie: "Oh yeah, 'cause all Americans had the restaurants. Greeks were in the restaurant business too after a while. Had some beautiful restaurants in Oakland. [....]"

Hammill: "So you had the feeling that everybody just blended well?"

Christie: "Yeah, blended well, yes. When the Greeks got Americanized and learned the language---in the beginning it was a little difficult, you know. There was a barrier between them and the American people for instance. They got acquainted with the American people they used to, became very popular, well liked. And some made a good success in business too and the Americans used to go to them and give them business-"

Hammill: "Do you think in the early days, however, there were some instances where the Oaklanders who were already here didn't welcome the immigrants?"

Christie: "Oh, they used to treat them all the same way you know: 'Get off the sidewalk....! [Apparently all immigrants could be hazed but not by 'good Americans, not the elite.' Teachers were very helpful to immigrants struggling to learn English. Does he remember any of his early teachers? No, not by name. Does he remember Father MacNally? No, he doesn't even remember the name of St. Patrick's. Were there individuals within the Orthodox Church who played significant roles in the community? He talks briefly about the first priest and the board of directors, good Christians, who ran the church. "They did everything to see the church established and keep on going." Christie has tried to hand down these traditions and the spirit of unity which was so prevalent from these early days. He feels that

Americans definitely gave the immigrant Greeks a helping hand. Everything was different then.]

"Some of those boys used to work 12, 14 hours a day to come up. And some of them made money, they made enough money to raise a family, to bring the brides from Greece and buy homes---they were very cheap those days. A couple of thousand dollars or so, you could buy a nice home, in those days. And they helped their folks at home. And some of them went back to Greece, you know they said, 'I'm going to go back and live there.' And they were sorry ever since."

Hammill: "Is that right?"

Christie: "Because they changed their mind after they went there because Greece wasn't like what they thought it would be."

Hammill: "...I'm assuming that in your home, for example, that you would have mainly Greek food. Or would you try to Americanize your [cooking] quickly too?"

Christie: "Yes, mostly Greek food and American food.... My mother was a good cook, but quickly she learned how to, she just liked American dishes and American pastries."

Hammill: "Did she work?"

Christie: "No. No, she stay at home. [His brother was younger.] He worked, I worked too."

Hammill: "You did? What did you do?"

Christie: "I used to work down at the round house at night."

Hammill: "At night?"

Christie: "Go to school during the day."

Hammill: "Now was that a common thing for young men to do?"

Christie: "Oh, they gave me a job there."

Hammill: "Or there weren't many young men. You were lucky?"

Christie: "No. They gave you a job for kids, you know, 16."

Hammill: "What kind of a job?"

Christie: "I used to fill lamps in the trains, that's all, just a light job. [He filled them with kerosene.]

Hammill: "How long did you work?"

Christie: "Oh I worked there about a year and a half or so. That was the end before we left for Los Angeles."

Hammill: "How many hours?"

Christie: "Eight hours at night, it used to be. It was an easy job...."

Hammill: "And then you would get up in the morning?"

Christie: "Yeah, in the morning and I used to go to school."

Hammill: "Let's go back [she wonders what his day's schedule was like. He would go to school at 8:30 or so. Came home after school but didn't have much time for play. He went to work at midnight. Would have some time to sleep on the job. Woke up at 8 and came home before school. The job paid about $80 or $90 a month. S.P. hired many young men in these menial positions. His father made about $175 a month. His younger brother also worked to help out.]

Christie: "Originally ... I sold papers. And you'll like to know that story. I went to Oakland, I went down on the Oakland Pier and I got a job, I used to sell papers, the Tribune and The Examiner. And I used to come with the train from Oakland Pier down to Seventh Street, back again. So I made two, three dollars a day.... And Armistice Day, November 11th, 1918, at the conclusion of the First World War. It was a most beautiful night, oh, I cannot tell you! Whistles used to blow all over the City, something fantastic! Armistice was signed that night, you know? So I went to work the next day, selling papers. And people was ---I don't know where all the people turned out from! Thousands of thousands of people travelled from Oakland to San Francisco that day by train.... And I made ten dollars and forty cents that day. And I went home, I never made so much money, in my life! Thought I was rich. I'll never forget that experience."

Hammill: "Oh, that stands out in your mind!"

Christie: [He talks about the first teacher he had in Burbank, California. He was ten-years-old and yet they started him off in kindergarten as he spoke no English. He did got to school a bit in Greece.]

Hammill: "As a child then up here in West Oakland, you didn't have much time for play?"

Christie: "No, I didn't have much time."

Hammill: "Was that true of your other playmates in your neighborhood too? That they were working too?"

Christie: "No, no, some of them no. They didn't. We were poor, you know.... My father was poor. And then we had a mortgage back in Greece. He wanted to pay that mortgage...."

Hammill: "How much were you paying for rent, I wonder?"

Christie: "$12.50 a month, but a beautiful home: five-room house, two bedrooms, dining room, kitchen and a living room. Nice yard and a garage. The old homes. You know, $12.50! I'll never forget that. We used to live on about a $150 a month. Plus we saved money every month."

Hammill: "Would the whole family go shopping once a week? Or did your mother take care of that?"

Christie: "Uh, my mother used to go shopping. My father used to go shopping. Walked downtown and shopped. West Oakland was loaded with nice stores in those days."

Hammill: "Would you go to Seventh Street mostly?"

Christie: "Yeah. There were a lot of nice stores, lot of department stores. Seventh Street was a beautiful spot...."

Hammill: "You didn't have to go any further than that?"

Christie: "No. Not any further than downtown."

Hammill: "When you say 'uptown' or 'downtown' do you mean Seventh or do you mean Washington?"

Christie: "Yeah, Broadway, Washington. [Swan's Market is still there, or at least it was at the time of this interview. They paid their water bill directly at the water company. "I cannot forget those beautiful days." Does he remember when Ratto's was at its original location? Yes but only in 1931, when the family returned. What does he think about the present-day changes on 9th Street? Progress is ok but he feels that people have lost their values. "People are not like they used to be."]

Hammill: [What did his family do to relax, have fun?]

Christie: "Well, we used to go to Name Days and visit other people. [Name days are a Greek tradition which are celebrated (by men only usually) rather than birthdays. Thus all Georges celebrated on St. George's Day. Parties were held at homes, not at church. The church did sponsor various events at local halls or at parks. When they first

came to this area it was difficult, financially. On Name days they usually roasted a lamb, people would eat, sing. Sometimes musicians would play.]

Hammill: "Did you make your own wine too?"

Christie: "Yeah, yeah. It was Prohibition in those days. Some of the Greeks they used to [slight chuckle] they used to be secret about it.... They used to make it in the cellar. If they ever get caught, that's it! [....]

Hammill: "Did you have a yard? Did you have a yard in your house?"

Christie: "Yeah, little yard in the back, little yard and basement there. Yeah. My father made a little wine. But as I say it was Prohibition. I guess you're aware of that. It's tough days, you know, if they catch you!"

Hammill: "Did other friends and so forth share in the winemaking?"

Christie: "Yeah, they made their own. Yeah they made it ... a couple of barrels, some of them. They know how to make it too, it was good wine, homemade wine. The Greeks used to love that."

Hammill: "...you didn't have the money to go over the San Francisco or-"

Christie: "No, no. No car. No money.... My father had to pay the property in the old country. Then we had to get a little money ahead. [They would go to shows once in a while. The Greeks sponsored picnics at Eastshore Park in Richmond. Some Americans used to come also. In 1921 the church also sponsored a Greek Independence Day Celebration at 16th and Jefferson in the Pacific Building, upstairs. There was lots of food, entertainment, Greek dancing. People came from all over. In later years he did go into San Francisco to attend Greek events but they didn't have the festivals like they have today.]

Hammill: "You mentioned, when I talked to you earlier, that you remember some of the parades in Oakland. And what occasions were those?"

Christie: [The City sponsored parades. The Police and unions organized parades in the 1920s. The Masons gave a parade in 1922 for a convention. "This was the most beautiful parade I've ever seen." Beautiful how? Floats, folks dressed up, music, etc. They came down 16th Street from San Pablo. It apparently lasted 2-3 hours.]

End of Tape 1, Side 1

Tape 1, Side 2

[There is a long piece of blank tape at the beginning of side 2]

[Christie doesn't remember any crime in his neighborhood. Police walked the beat. He doesn't remember any of their names. Christie often walked home at night. Does he remember Mayor Davey? Yes. He walked around the streets. Does he remember Pardee or other local landowners? No.]

[Shopping? Hammill asks him to reconstruct a typical shopping day. He mentions that his family shopped in West Oakland but that they also went to Swan's Market on 10th. They used to bring home olive oil. Bread was delivered to their house, it came from the Athens Bakery. The bakery had trucks by his childhood. His family bought a lot of lamb and cheese. His mother made yogurt and occasionally wheat bread. Their family of four lived on $150 a month.]

Christie: "There used to be a lot of stores down around Seventh and Clay, Seventh and Broadway. A lot of little stores that had clothes, you know. Used to have suits of clothes, second-hands [sic] suits. And people used to go buy... some of the people used to go buy. They were beautiful suits, five dollars a suit. Beautiful suits. Brand new."

Hammill: "What was the biggest treat for you if you went along? Did you get some candy or ice cream ...?"

Christie: "Oh I used to love candy, yeah. I used to love candy. [He also enjoyed root beer which he bought after church on Seventh Street. A glass cost a nickle.]

[Does he remember the ferries? Yes, he travelled these many times to San Francisco. He recalls attending the ceremonies held in 1934 when they first started to work on the Bay Bridge. Hollywood actress Olivia deHavilland was in attendance as were many dignitaries and officials. The event was held (he thinks) at 25th and Market. When he first came to Oakland in 1918 people talked about the possibility of spanning the Bay.]

Hammill: "You remembered once when you were talking to me about World War I, watching the boys come home was it?"

Christie: "Fantastic. We had a beautiful porch in the front of the house where we used to live. And I used to sit there, you know. And I used to watch train loads and train

loads, because the railroad tracks were right across there, you know, about a 100 feet."

Hammill: "Your house on Pine Street?"

Christie: "Yeah, right on the corner. ...about 100 feet away. You see train loads and train loads of the boys used to come home, from the War, you know. They went down to the Oakland Pier... and from there they sent them home. Now when I was selling papers (I might as well tell you this too) down on Oakland Pier, several times they used to gather there, I don't know how many men, would be 500 or 1000, I don't know how many. And they used to sing before they embark on the trains, the soldiers. Something fantastic...."

Hammill: "What were the songs, I wonder...?"

Christie: "I cannot remember, beautiful."

Hammill: "The only one I can remember from World War I is 'Lilly Marlane,' and I don't suppose that they sang that!"

Christie: [He remembers a line or two from a song which he sang at school. Does he remember when the Posey Tube was built? He thinks that was built when they left West Oakland for Los Angeles. He does recall Neptune Beach in Alameda, also Idora Park. His family considered buying a home when they built up this area. Did that become a Greek community? No. "After a while, when the Greeks moved from West Oakland, they move all over town." [....]

"I can tell you way back, the original Greeks what they did. Way back, the stories that they told me.... Probably before the turn-of-the-century, a lot of them used to, when they first came here, a lot of them worked on the railroad, building the railroad tracks. And they used to sleep in boxcars... they used to sleep in there. And they used to cook in there, do their cooking, and sleep back there. And they used to---you live very cheap. And the salary was very low. So that's how they got by...."

Hammill: "As the trains moved along they slept and lived in the boxcars."

Christie: [This is the Southern Pacific. He has seen pictures of the boxcars. The men would entertain there on Sundays. His father worked on the railroad. He first came to America c 1898. He returned to Greece several times and finally he brought his family over. He lived in Los Angeles and Chicago and several other states. He peddled goods from a wagon. Chicago was the first place that he settled. His father would return to Greece as he was homesick. The railroad workers were paid a dollar a day, perhaps a dollar

and a half. They lived in poor conditions. His parents were married before his father came to the United States. They were from the same village.]

[Hammill asks about the impact of World War II. Was there a similar movement of troops through West Oakland as had occurred in World War I? No, it wasn't similar. Mr. Christie started the California Wholesale Grocery Business in 1931 on his own. The business was once located on 4022 Grove Street. They then moved to San Pablo, 12th Street and finally to their current location. He discusses the reasons for the various moves. He has enjoyed his work over the years, the good and the bad.]

[Christie was born in Greece in a village near the city of Tripolis. (There is a long pause in the tape, probably due to the fact that this is a copy.) Does he recall the changes to West Oakland during World War II? Yes, although he no longer lived in West Oakland his business took him into the area. European ethnic groups began to move out; the area was becoming run down, also people were concerned about safety. Did he ever take the trolleys to the end of the lines to visit the new streetcar suburbs like Temescal and Piedmont? No. When did his family first get a car? When they moved to Los Angeles, so fairly early.]

[Were there fraternal organizations? Yes. He served as President of the Benevolent Society of Oakland. They also had a local chapter of the national group, HEPA. They also had a chapter of Pan-Arcadia Federation of America. He apparently was born in the village of Skopje. They also had GAPA, locally. HEPA is still active. They still have death benefits. It is important to have social functions to keep a club going. These organizations were very important to Greek immigrants. The church was also important; did "so much for the Greeks in American. Did so much to bring them up, spiritually ...." "They brought them up, keep them going. Otherwise, I believe the Greeks wouldn't have been where they are today without the church." The church is still strong, even among Greek-American youth. After they moved to Ruby Street did his family continue to attend church on Brush Street? Yes, he served as President one year.]

[Christie and Hammill look at pictures which show the Archbishop on a visit at the Brush Street church. Christie discusses this event with enthusiasm.]

Hammill: "Mr. Christie, I don't think I asked you what were the boundaries, what you considered the boundaries of your West Oakland. What was West Oakland to you?"

Christie: "Oh, from Henry Street down to Market Street. ..or Pine, Henry was just a block west of Pine where I used

to live. Down to Market Street, about twelve blocks or so. About a mile, mile and a half. And you go as far as 18th Street...."

Hammill: [Christie's family lived, he said, on $150 a month. Were there other families in West Oakland that were living a more luxurious standard of living?]

Christie: "No, no, everybody'd I say were poor, were just getting started. There wasn't anybody that had any money in those days. When they built the church down there when I was a boy they had a hard time to raise money to pay for it. Everybody was poor. And they use to only charge them fifty cents a month for dues, you know. That was hard for some people to pay too. So no, nobody lived in luxury."

Hammill: "It was later on...."

Christie: [After World War II there were more opportunities and some Greeks enjoyed financial success.]

Hammill: [What was his favorite treat or outing? He loved the picnics, also his religion. He remembers particularly the Greek-sponsored outings to Eastshore Park in Richmond. The Greeks went there for years and years. They would have lots of Greek dancing and music. San Francisco groups as well as Oakland Greek organizations used this park. Does he remember people talking about the earthquake? He heard stories about this event for years.]

[They discuss again the railroads and how "foreigners" did this work. Men would save their money to return to Greece. It cost $80 to go from New York to Greece.]

End of Tape 1, Side 2

Tape 2, Side 1

Christie: "...it took about a $125 or less to go to Greece from here, very cheap. So if they had 5 or 6 hundred dollars they had money left over to go back and help the family out. A hundred or two hundred dollars is a lot of help over there, a lot of help. I remember as a little boy, maybe you should like to know that, back there they used to come, they thought that America was so far, far, far away, everybody used to go out and see the American come home. I remember, I can see him right now. It was fantastic! Just to go out and see it. Everybody go down the street and wait to see him.... And it used to break my heart when I used to hear of America. I wanted to come to America, as a little boy."

Interview with Paul Christie

[Did his father have stories about working with various groups, e.g. Chinese, on the railroads? No, other than some of the American boys were rough, and would try to beat him up. He didn't hear about Chinese *(ed. note: the Chinese presence on the railroad was mostly prior to this period.)* His father also lived in Mexico for a while around 1900. Jobs were hard to find. He was about 27 when he first came to America. Finally he came here in 1908 for good. Mr. Christie's uncle got his father a job on the SP in West Oakland. What brought the uncle to West Oakland from Chicago? Christie doesn't know. Christie remembers seeing Native Americans walking around on the streets of West Oakland in the 1920s.]

[What was Seventh Street like? Street was full of people, Americans, Portuguese, Greeks, a few Mexicans, a few blacks. All kinds of people. There were Greek coffeehouses on Seventh. He was impressed and still is impressed by the way the Greek families raised their children. They imparted religious values and a work ethic. Greek-Americans have become good citizens and business people.]

[What was it like when he returned to Greece? His village was the same, still poor, few conveniences. It was almost unchanged over the 60 years. A lot of the Greek country people have left---there is little or no future. Christie speaks with pride about America. West Oakland provided a good start for the various immigrants. He contrasts Los Angeles with West Oakland: LA was a large city and it didn't provide the kind of concentrated, small-town environment. "West Oakland was a nest: just to come in and just build up. Get started." He remarks on how established Greeks would help newly-arrived immigrants.]

[Ms. Hammill notes that she recently saw Mr. Lekus, former candy company owner. Christie remembers that if you went into a Greek restaurant the owners wouldn't charge you. He likes these traditions and the emphasis on fellowship. Life is more than just money and material goods.]

[Hammill and Christie discuss the Depression at some length. Christie gives examples of prices for cars, homes, meals, etc. He started his wholesale grocery business during this time. He and his father had a small grocery store in Los Angeles and Christie became discouraged at how hard they worked for so little. Conditions improved when Roosevelt was elected. Christie's brother went to Hollywood to work. He was a friend of Ronald Reagan when they worked together in the Screen Actor's Guild.]

[Did his mother miss Greece? Yes. "She wanted to go back, she was crying for Greece, crying for her parents, her sister, her brothers...." She was 40 when she came over. They came over in 1916 during the War. They were concerned

about submarine activity. One morning they did see a submarine. The Captain of his ship raised the Italian flag. On the return voyage the ship was sunk. They arrived in New York City and then took the train across country to LA (Burbank). His mother never returned to Greece. In Greece they had a farm of sorts--with patches of land here and there. "She was crying for Greece all her life." Christie kept his mother at home until she died at 94.]

[His wife is Greek-American and was born in Manteca. Her family had a 50-acre farm. He met his wife at a party at Eastshore Park.]

[Christie talks about the professions chosen by the second generation. Many chose professional careers over staying in the restaurant and grocery business. Hammill notes that the schools did a good job educating such a diverse population of students. Christie remembers that kids were highly disciplined then. Children today are "wild." Did kids bring their lunch to school (Prescott) or was there a cafeteria? He's not sure. Christie relates an anecdote about his first week or so in school.]

End of formal interview

INDEX: INTERVIEW WITH PAUL CHRISTIE

California Wholesale Grocery, p. 1, 14, 16

children's work/roles, p. 9, 12

Christie, Paul, p. 1, 7-9, 14, 17
- **family history,** p. 1, 13-14, 16

clothing, p. 12

crime, p. 12

day schools, p. 4

Depression (the), p. 16

Eastshore Park (Richmond), p. 15

ethnic groups (in West Oakland), p. 4, 16

ethnic relations, p. 7

Greece, p. 8, 15-17

Greek Americans (in West Oakland), pp. 2-5, 8, 13, 16
- **acculturation,** p. 4, 7
- **foodways,** p. 8, 12
- **fraternal organizations,** p. 14
- **marriage,** p. 5
- **name days,** pp. 10-11
- **occupations,** pp. 3-9, 13, 16-17

religion, p. 3, 5-7, 14

social events, p. 2, 6-7, 10-11

values, p.7, 16

Greek Orthodox Church (Brush Street), p. 3, 5-7, 10, 14-15

housing, p. 10

Lake Merritt, p. 6

parades, p. 11

peddlers, p. 6

Pine Street (403 Pine and neighborhood), pp. 2-3, 10, 12-13

Prescott School, p. 3, 17

San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, p. 12

Seventh Street, p. 10, 16

shopping, p. 10, 12

Southern Pacific Railroad, pp. 3-4, 8-9, 13

transportation, pp. 3-4, 6, 12

West Oakland (identity/boundaries) p. 5, 14

wine-making, p. 11

women's work/role, p. 4, 8, 16

World War I, p. 3, 9, 12-13